SYNOPSIS

TITLE: The Craft of the Screenplay: A Critical Survey of English Screenwriting and Analysis of Select Screenplays

Screenwriting:Historical Background

The activity of writing for cinematic representation started with the emergence of cinema as a source of public entertainment. Screenplay was earlier called as 'scenario' or 'continuity script' consisting of list of scenes that described silent action and camera angles a kind of instruction manual for the director. The history of the screenplay is difficult to trace due to problem of language but the word 'screenplay' was commonly used in 1940s. The early 'scripts' were little more than brief synopses. Scenarios were written in synopses form and rarely were longer than one paragraph or even shorter than that. They included a title and a one line description of the action to be seen. The scripts earlier were used for marketing purposes. They were read to the new audience while the film was projected, to clarify the story, as the early cinema lacked sound and dialogues.

After 1901, as films became longer and narration became more prominent the importance of scripting was realized.Early scripts bear little resemblance to the screenplays.They were just technical aids. Scripts gave narrative coherence to the films. But later as the films became longer the narrative coherence was tobe kept and so the scripting became more important to maintain the continuity of action and so the scripts started being called as 'continuities'. The continuity had become more or less standard practice by 1914. From around 1910 writing for film became truly efficient fir the first time and developed into the indispensible core of the film making system. The written text that guided a film's production became a literary form. The text

rendered the shots that the director later realized. The Hollywood industrial system had accepted the written text as an important guiding force in the production of entertainment properties but some rejected it as a literary text because, the process of scripting for the screen did not so much emerge naturally from other literary forms such as the play script or the novel or the poetry nor meet the artistic needs of film makers but developed primarily to address the manufacturing needs of industrial production. Hence the script existed as a technical document, not as artistic one.

Scripting gained importance in the sound era with the birth of the 'talkie'.The script automatically came to be of paramount importance. It needed dialogues , as a play did but it was different from a play as the technical details remained on the same plane with dialogues so there was so much of crowding on the same page where the dialogues as well as technical details appeared along, so during 1970s the continuity script became the shooting script in which shot by shot scene writing is reversed for the director after the script has been improved for being produced while the "Master Scene Format" emerged as the new standard for writer's draft. Master scene script would be a separate script without any technical details or how the film is to be shot but it will only give idea of time and place. Director then will decide the camera angles, close-ups etc. This form evolved in 1950-52 it was not the predominant screen writing style. At some point it became standard. Over time fewer technical terms were needed because the screenplay became increasingly more literary and more able to shape visual imagery for the readers.

Gradually,the screenplay's authority over the execution of production diminished. It was no more executing the screen play; the technical detailing was taken away from writing and the screenplay writer was established independent of the director .The screenplay writer became the

author of the film. Screenplay attained its separate identity free from the shooting script. The writer's draft became something other and more literary. The establishment of the screenplay as a more autonomous literary form wasn't a transition but an effect. History of screenplay is not a history of a kind of document but of its name too. The first known use of the one word designation, "screenplay" dates to the 1940 Academy Awards. This use refers to writing practice that was not understood as screenplays by practitioners of the day. Both scenario writing and screen writing are specialized kinds of writing. Screenplay is a play written in the language of the screen,a complete description of a motion picture, and how to accomplish the thing described in it, making it a unique art form.

Screenplay:A Form of Literature

Screenplay is today defined as"a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure. It is the art of visual storytelling." Storytelling has always been part of human culture. Screenplays do the same but they do it through cinema and the concept of screenplay is also recent .Screenplays can be valued as literature because plays have always been considered as literature which is written to be performed on stage and screenplays are written to be produced on screen.

Literature is written in various forms like novel, poem, epic, short story; play etc. screenplays do have a different form of writing but perform the same function as that of literature that is to entertain. Entertainment is the reason so much money is spent at the cinema each year. Films are another aspect of literature, one which takes this distraction a step further by providing the imagery that is only described in a novel. This escape from fact into fictional world created by the writer is an opportunity for diversion for the reader and this is an important function of

literature. Literature has another aspect to its credit and that is education. Literature is also used to document the past. Many novels have been based around leading figures, andhuge numbers of non-fiction books about people and places and events have been written. Filmmakers and playwrights use a historical event to put their own views and a fictional storyline across with a realistic setting as a backdrop. There is a little difference in a way screenplay is written and other literary forms, but that doesn't make screenplay of less literary value. It is a creative fiction with the characters, the plotline, the theme, the setting, the symbolism, the irony, the hidden meaning which put together creates artistic unity. The scripts earlier were not printed to be published they were instruction manuals for the people associated with the film like actors read it for their dialogues, director for studying how a particular scene is to be shot, cinematographer for deciding camera angles assistants for shopping the required props etc. but the growing curiosity of the cinema lovers and critics have created a tremendous demand for the screenplays to be published and are made available in bookstores. The majority of the people prefer easy way of watching the film rather than reading it as both the forms do have their own literary value, the screenplays in a book form has become a common sight in bookstore shelves under various titles like entertainment, autobiographies or fiction. A screenplay with its separate narrative technique of storytelling is seen doing the same function of creating artistic insights for the readers.

The Aspects of Screenwriting

Over the years, the art and craft of screenplay have evolved both in terms of form and of content. Various scholars from the fields of Cinema Studies, Popular Culture and Literature have started paying critical attention to the screenplay as a cultural and literary artifact. The following have emerged as some of the common elements in the structure of the screenplay.

Script elements are the unique margin, case and position attributes that give script text the format and consistency.

a) Scene Heading: also called ‘slugline’ written in capitals at a distance from margin. It tells reader time and place of the scene.
b) Action: Here a reader is told what happens on the screen.
c) Characterization: Character elements are in upper case and followed immediately by dialogue.
d) Dialogue: written immediately after character.
e) Parenthetical: parenthetical elements are wrapped in parenthesis and follow a character or dialogue element.
f) Transition: are used to indicate special information about how one scene transitions to another.

Screenplay is a unique literary form not to be judged by actor’s performance. It’s a finished product to entertain the audience and written using technical jargon and stage directions, focusing on describing literal, visual aspects of the story. Some elements of the screenplay have been established on the basis of pre-existing theories. Notable among these are thetheories of Aristotle and Joseph Campbell. The Three act structure has its base in Aristotle’s *Poetics*:1) The set up (location and characters)2) Confrontation (with an obstacle)3) Resolution (culminating in a climax)The middle act is longer compared to first and second.The Hero’s Journey: Its structure is formulated by Joseph Campbell.It is also called as the ‘Monomyth’.It consists of a call to adventure, a road of trials, achieving the goal, returning to ordinary world,-application of the goal.

Contemporary Screenplay scholar Syd Field improvised on the Three Act Structure, as the middle act was getting lengthy and boring; he split the middle act in two parts. Another scholar Frank Daniel developed 'The Sequence Approach'**.** This approach is also referred as eight sequence structure. It is so called because the story is generally divided into eight sequences of eight to ten minutes. Each earlier sequence's resolution creates the situation that creates the set up for the next situation.

Theoretical Framework

Screenplay, when regarded as a literary text, can be studied with the help of theoretical framework provided by several critical practices viz. Narratology, Discourse Analysis, Dramatic Theory , Popular Culture Studies and Film Studies. The Screenplay can be seen to be using diverse narratological devices and techniques. Narratology, as a science of the narrative, has evolved into a specialized field today offering us insights into the narrative structure and the ways that these affect our perception. The theories from TzvetanTodorov, Vladimir Propp and Gerald Prince can be used to enhance the understanding of the screenplay's narrative structure as well as its impact. Similarly, the screenplay can be examined as a "discursive formation" as it is an act of communication. Michel Foucault applied the discursive formation in the analyses of large bodies of knowledge, such as political economy and natural history. Screenplay, when looked at as a discourse, involves the study of the language used in it. The analysis of a discourse examines and determines the connections among language and structure and agency. The Dramatic Theory can very well be applied to the screenplay because it is a text prepared for a dramatic representation to be filmed. The theories of Popular Culture are helpful in locating the screenplay along the axis of popular practices.

Significance and Relevance of the Proposed Research

Screenplays, as independent texts, arrived on bookstore shelves in the 1970s. Since then there has been a tremendous upsurgein the evolution of writing for the screen. Today, the popularity ofscreenwriting and filmmaking is an integral part of our culture andcannot be ignored. With the dramatic rise of computer technology and computergraphic imagery, the expanded influence of TV, new wireless LAN technology, and the enormousincrease in film production,the world is in the middleof a cinematic revolution. It is most pertinent therefore to trace the history of screenplay from the silent movie era through its various stages- the talkie, the colour cinema, the 70 mm stereophonic cinema- to the contemporary Digital Cinema. The analysis of the screenplay as a form of literature can yield to new critical insights.Thus an inquiry into the evolution of a new art form- the screenplay, over the course of a century, can be considered as a relevant effort in the field of literary studies.

Objectives

The proposed study has the following broad objectives:

a) To identify principles for critical appreciation of screenplays.

b) To categorize structural and thematic elements in the selected texts: screenplays written for some of the most significant movies in English.

c) To evaluate the selected screenplays as narratives and dramatic scripts.

d) To make a comprehensive critical statement regarding analysis of screenplays as literary artifacts.

Scope

The proposed research aims at making a comprehensive critical survey of English screenplay writing from its earliest stages i.e. the first decade of 20th century up to the most recent developments in the contemporary times. The period covered by the survey is therefore 1900-2015. The study is restricted to the screenplays written in English language for the films made in USA and UK(the two major locations of film production). However, other territories like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Nigeria, Hong Kong that have been making significant contribution to the field of Film making, will also be taken into consideration. The texts for critical analysis include screenplays are the landmarks in the history of cinema. Although the study primarily focuses on the cinema of the English speaking/ English knowing audience, references to the other significant texts from the World Cinema shall also be made in order to lend the proposed study universal credence.

Methodology

The method of library research with extensive use of internet resources shall be followed. The proposed study does not have necessity of field work, hence the method of field work, survey etc. does not seem to be required. However, interaction with notable critics shall be undertaken and responses from prominent screenwriters shall be sought through questionnaires. Personal interviews shall be conducted and visits to the major research centers shall be undertaken. The MLA style of research writing shall be followed.

Plan of the thesis

The proposed thesis consists of the following five chapters

Chapter 1- The Evolution of Screenwriting: a Historical Perspective

Chapter 2- Screenwriting as a Literary Activity

Chapter 3-The Structure and Content of Screenplay: Theoretical Framework

Chapter 4- Analysis of Select Screenplays

Chapter 5- Conclusion

Primary sources

Some of the screenplays to be taken up for close reading are as follows:

1) *The Great Train Robbery* by Edwin s. Porter (1903)

2) *Intolerance* by D W Griffith (1916)

3) *City Lights* by Charles Chaplin (1931)

4) *Citizen Kane* by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles(1941)

5) *Titanic* by Charles Bracket, Richard L.Breen and Walter Reisch (1953)

6) *The Godfather* by Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo(1972)

7) *Chinatown Movie* by Robert Towne (1974)

8) *Annie Hall* by Woody Allen (1977)

9) *Gandhi* by John Briley (1982)

10) *Scarface* by Oliver Stone (1983)

11) *Pulp Fiction* by Quentin Tarantino (1994)

12) *The Hurt Locker* by Mark Boal (2009)

However, the critical analysis shall include other significant screenplays also and the study shall not be limited only to the texts mentioned above.

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